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AXE REMDESIVIR FROM COVID TREATMENT PROTOCOL: W.H.O.

The UN health body said on Friday there's no evidence that the drug improved the prospects of hospitalised patients

MAY STILL BENEFIT A SUBGROUP OF PATIENTS

The new guidelines come a month after results of WHO's multi-country Solidarity Trial revealed that the antiviral drug had no significant positive outcome on the chances of survival, the need for a ventilator, or the length of hospital stay in patients with severe Covid-19. The WHO, however, said there may still be a potential small benefit in a subgroup of patients

EXPERTS DIVIDED OVER ITS EFFECTIVENESS

- Reactions to the WHO trial's findings have been mixed with many health experts welcoming it while others expressing reservations
- A recent study by a group of doctors in Bengaluru found that the drug improved patients' survival chances if given early. A US govt-approved study had also come out with a similar finding in April

₹24,000

THE COST OF A COURSE OF REMDESIVIR TREATMENT IN INDIA

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Door-to-door survey as Delhi ramps up response

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

AMID continuing surge in Covid-19 cases, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday sought to enforce pandemic discipline by meeting representatives of market associations and seeking their cooperation, while assuring he does not want to shut down the markets.

He urged the representatives to provide masks for free to shoppers not wearing them. Parallelly, the government sought to wield the stick, as it provided legal teeth to the penalty of a whopping ₹2,000 it intends to slap on those flouting the mask norm. To do so, Lt Governor Anil Baijal approved a proposal to amend the Delhi Epidemic Disease Management of Covid-19 Regulations 2020, to insert the penalty.

Meanwhile, the Delhi government has begun a door-to-door survey to identify people having Covid symptoms. The massive exercise is expected to be completed in five days and cover over 57 lakh people.

In all, 6,608 new cases were detected in Delhi that is already witnessing a third Covid wave, taking the cumulative cases to 5,17,238. Also, 118 deaths were reported in a 24-hour span. The air quality too continued to be poor with smog choking the city's lungs.

Neighbouring Haryana recorded its highest single-day spike with 3,104 people testing positive. In Maharashtra, the fresh case count is now averaging 5,000 as compared to 2,000-2,500 last week. Wary of a second wave, Mumbai's schools and colleges will not open till December 31. They were earlier slated to reopen on November 23. With a steady uptick in fresh cases in Gujarat, night curfew has been imposed in Surat, Rajkot and Vadodara, in addition to Ahmedabad. P9

COVID BATTLE: WHERE K'TAKA STANDS

Recovery rate is at its highest: 95.81%

Positivity rate in the state had dropped from its peak of 12.54% on September 27, to 8.71% on November 20

Doubling period has increased significantly, with the state taking 68 days to double its cases

Negative growth rate of active Covid cases

Mortality rate is inching towards 1%, and currently stands at 1.33% P3

RBI open to letting large firms own banks

Feels private lenders will drive growth; wants to expand banking sector after strengthening supervisory oversight

SESA SEN @ New Delhi

IT is time to open up India's banking sector to allow large companies to own banks, according to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

In its report released Friday, an internal RBI panel, headed by RBI Central Board Director P K Mohanty, said industrial houses can be allowed to promote banks after the Banking Regulations Act is amended to this effect.

The supervisory wing of the regulator must also be strengthened to prevent connected lending and exposures between banks and other financial and non-financial group entities, the internal group report noted.

The suggestions are significant as the central bank has in the past been firmly opposed to allowing large corporate entities to own banks.

The working group also suggested that large non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) with asset size of ₹50,000 crore and above, including those owned by corporate entities, be converted into banks subject to completion of 10 years of operations. This could benefit industrial houses such as Aditya Birla, Bajaj, Mahindra & Mahindra and Tata Sons that already have large NBFCs with more than a decade of operations.

HIGHER PROMOTER STAKE

- Promoters' stake be raised to 26% from the current 15% over 15 years, the report suggested
- It also recommended minimum initial capital requirement for licensing new banks be doubled to ₹1,000 crore for universal banks and enhanced to ₹300 crore from ₹200 cr for small finance banks

Back in the 1990s, when RBI doled out its first set of licences for private banks, it had left out industrial houses. However, the P K Mohanty panel, whose brief was to review the extant ownership guidelines and corporate structure for Indian private sector banks, said private banks will be crucial for the future growth of the banking sector, which is currently dominated by government-owned lenders.

Fourteen licences for universal banks have been issued in the private sector since 1993, out of which only 10 are operational now. While private banks recorded sustained growth over the years, there's a long way to break into the global top 100.

Currently, only the government-owned State Bank of India figures among the top 100 global banks by size. Large private banks including ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank have sizes lower than that of Spanish Banco de Sabadell, which ranks 100th.

The RBI has sought comments from stakeholders on the internal group's report by January 15, 2021, after which it will take a final call. P13

Info on husband's income just an RTI away

KANU SARDA @ New Delhi

IF you suspect your estranged husband is concealing the size of his gross income to avoid paying maintenance, just file a Right to Information (RTI) application with the Income Tax Department to ferret out the data.

The Central Information Commission recently upheld the right of a spouse to get the data through the RTI mechanism. The order came as a huge relief for women, as in most matrimonial disputes, husbands understate their income, but are called out in court due to lack of proof.

The order came on an appeal filed by Rahmat Bano of Jodhpur wherein the commission rejected the I-T department's spin of her being a third party to block information. The CIC also rubbished the argument that seeking such information is out of the ambit of the RTI Act. It directed Jodhpur's I-T department to provide the data to Bano within 15 days.

Plugging the loopholes

"If false statements and misrepresentations are made, the court may consider initiation of perjury proceedings and for contempt of court," a Supreme Court bench recently said

The order came days after the Supreme Court tightened the rules regarding grant of maintenance in matrimonial cases. Henceforth, both spouses will have to make full disclosure of their income and assets from the date the maintenance application is filed.

The court noted that in many cases, husbands refuse to pay maintenance or alimony by disposing of their assets and claiming reduced income.

EXPRESS READ

Sonia sets up panel on eco, national security

New Delhi: Congress chief Sonia Gandhi on Friday set up three separate committees on economic affairs, foreign affairs and national security. P9

Biden wins Republican stronghold Georgia

Washington: US President-elect Joe Biden has won Georgia, becoming the first Democrat to win the state since 1992. P12

Oz expert flags threat to space infrastructure

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

WHILE satellite-enhanced capabilities for cyberspace are fuelling excitement globally, there are increasing concerns over the safety of space infrastructure to ensure cyber security, according to Tobias Feakin, Ambassador for Cyber Affairs & Critical Technology at the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Feakin, who is the head of the Australian government's international engagement to advance and protect its national security, foreign policy, economics, trade, and development interests in the internet and in cyberspace, noted that cyber security through space infrastructure plays a crucial role with the enormous amount of bandwidth capabilities that satellites are now providing.

Speaking at a session on 'From Cyberspace to Outer Space: Innovating with Australia in a post-COVID world' at the Bengaluru Tech Summit 2020 on Friday, he said there is a huge amount of bandwidth uplift now with satellites catering to remote places rapidly, with such capabilities also being utilised in Australia's development programmes in India.

"Yet, just like a lot of legacy equipment, such as energy plant or piece of transportation or other critical infrastructure from decades ago, spacecraft too weren't designed with cyber secuity in mind," he said, pointing out that its need has been heightened now. P4

K'taka signs 8 MoUs

Bengaluru: The Karnataka Government on Friday announced eight MoUs and intentions for collaboration with partner countries. Countries like Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, the UK and the USA showed their intent in partnering with Karnataka in the areas of skilling, R&D, ecosystem connects, life science and biotechnology, healthcare, etc.

SPACE COLLABORATION

Launch satellites from our launchpad: Sweden to Indian cos

PEARL MARIA D'SOUZA @ Bengaluru

A little over a month after Sweden approved a site to launch small satellites at Esrange Space Center in North Sweden on October 14, the Sweden Space Corporation has made an offer to private Indian companies to bring rockets to launch small satellites from their new launchpad.

Confirming this to The New Indian Express on the sidelines of Bengaluru Tech Summit 2020 on Friday, Arne Christer Fuglesang, Sweden-based European Space Agency (ESA) astronaut who is now Adjunct Professor in Space Physics at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, however, said no rocket building facilities would be provided in Sweden for these companies.

Fuglesang explained that rockets built and assembled by Indian companies could be transported into Sweden to the site, and Swedish satellites to be launched will not weigh more than 150kg.

Although an appealing offer, the feasibility for Indian startups remains a question, said a source from the industry. The four startups in India that are working on launch vehicles to release 150-kg satellites into space, are yet to prove their launch capability. Neither is there a private launch site for the same in India. Indian space startups, at the moment, are waiting for the space policy to be released. P6

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VANDALISM

Hoysala-era temple idol desecrated

B R UDAYKUMAR @ Hassan

SUSPECTED treasure hunters have desecrated and broken the idol of Goddess Mahakali at the historic Lakshmi temple in Doddagaddavalli of Belur taluk late night on Tuesday. However, the idols of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu, opposite the Mahakali idol were untouched.

The incident came to light when the temple priest went to offer puja to the deity on Friday morning. The miscreants have gained entry into the temple, located on the outskirts of the village, by breaking open the main door.

The over 900-year-old temple was built during the reign of Hoysala king Vishnuvardhana in 1113 AD. The Chatuskuta temple of the Hoysala style of architecture, was constructed by sculptors Pariyatra Mahavadda, Kullana Rahuta and his wife Sahaja Devi. Like the Hoysala temples in Belur and Halebid, the Lakshmi temple, with unique sculptures carved around it, also draws hordes of tourists and is conserved and maintained by the Archeological Survey of India.

Condemning the incident, Shivasugnana Murthy swamiji of Aremadanahalli Mutt, Arkalgud, has urged the district authorities to arrest those responsible and to take steps to install a new Mahakali idol at the earliest.

The broken idol of Goddess Mahakali at the 900-year-old Lakshmi temple in Doddagaddavalli of Belur taluk.

'Dept failed on security front'

Locals alleged that the Archeological department has failed to provide security to the historic temple. "The incident wouldn't have happened if security personnel had been posted", rued one of the villagers.